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The Moral Foundation of Democracy, by John H. Hallowell

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BOOK REVIEWS

THE MORAL FOUNDATION OF DEMOCRACY. By John H. Hallowell. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954. Pp. ix, 134. \$3.50.

In December, 1954, the Reece Committee on Tax-Exempt Foundations reported that the social sciences in the United States had been corrupted or dragooned by tax-exempt foundations into "an irresponsible 'fact finding mania.'"¹ Empiricism and experimentation threaten to bring national disaster. "Empiricism by the very nature of its approach, ignores moral precepts, principles and established or accepted norms of behavior, and seeks to base conclusions solely upon what the senses will take in by means of observation."² This leads to moral relativism, and "Moral relativism and the cultural lag theory strike at the very roots of the average American's traditional values. Promulgation of such unverified, pseudo-scientific theories dissolves the belief that religion gives us certain basic verities upon which we must construct a moral and ethical life, that certain basic and unalterable principles underlie our system of government and should be maintained faithfully for the preservation of our society."³ Experimentation in the natural sciences is good. "Experiment with human beings and their mode of living and being governed is, however, quite a different matter. If by 'experiment' is meant trying to find ways in which to make existing institutions better or better working, that too would be admirable. If by 'experiment' is meant trying to find ways in which other political and social institutions could be devised to supplant those we live by and are satisfied with—then such experiment is not a desirable use of public funds expended by private individuals without public accountability."⁴ It follows that "some of the larger foundations have directly supported 'subversion' in the true meaning of that term, namely, the process of undermining some of our vitally protective concepts and principles."⁵

It is a pity that the Committee did not examine the activities of the Charles R. Walgreen Foundation at the University of Chicago, for there it would have found comfort. After an initial period of uncertainty, the Walgreen Foundation has discovered its own political science—or politi-

1. TAX-EXEMPT FOUNDATIONS, Report of the Special Committee to Investigate Tax-Exempt Foundations and Comparable Organizations, H. R. REP. No. 2681, 83d Cong., 2d Sess. 18 (1954).

2. *Id.* at 60.

3. *Id.* at 88.

4. *Id.* at 31.

5. *Id.* at 19.

cal philosophy—one which rests on metaphysics rather than science, and which occupies itself with objective values rather than objective behavior. It is expressed in four volumes of lectures published by the University of Chicago Press: *Philosophy of Democratic Government* (1951), by Yves R. Simon; *The New Science of Politics* (1952), by Eric Voegelin; *Natural Right and History* (1953), by Leo Strauss; and *The Moral Foundation of Democracy* (1954), by John H. Hallowell. There are individual variations, but the four have a common source. This common source, the basis of the Walgreen political science, is the politics of St. Thomas Aquinas.

St. Thomas undertook to combine two sorts of truth: what he understood to be the teaching of Christian revelation and what he understood to be the teaching of reason. In the latter connection he made extensive use of Aristotle, but necessarily a Christianized Aristotle who bore little resemblance to the pupil of Plato.⁶ Even in Aquinas, reason and revelation were uneasy partners; and with later authors the emphasis shifted to one or the other element. Jesuit theology, launched by Molina in the sixteenth century and given definitive political expression by Suarez in the seventeenth, gave such attention to nature and reason as to overshadow revelation, and to expose the eighteenth century Jesuits to the Jansenist accusation of infidelity. The Arminian Grotius went further and erected a rationalistic system independent not only of revelation but of deity. The Jansenists, on the other hand, adopted an approach resembling that of Calvin; for them revelation and the supernatural were virtually exclusive standards of truth and value.

Of our authors, Simon appears to occupy substantially the Jesuit position; he is certainly the closest to St. Thomas. Strauss seems to have the general intellectual orientation of Grotius, though, oddly enough, he does not discuss Grotius in his book. Without rejecting a supernatural approach to politics, he is satisfied with a naturalistic one, a position for which he has been chided by Hallowell.⁷ Voegelin and Hallowell talk a great deal about "reason," but they both appear to be in the Jansenist tradition. For them the supernatural is the essential and decisive element in politics. To Voegelin "[t]he truth of man and the truth of God are inseparably one."⁸ To Hallowell history is "a dialogue between God and man."⁹

6. See JAFFA, THOMISM AND ARISTOTELIANISM (1952); Frank, *Modern and Ancient Legal Pragmatism—John Dewey & Co. vs. Aristotle*, 25 NOTRE DAME LAW. 205, 460 (1950); Wormuth, *Aristotle on Law* in ESSAYS IN POLITICAL THEORY PRESENTED TO GEORGE H. SABINE 45 (Konvitz and Murphy ed. 1948).

7. Hallowell, Book Review, 48 AM. POL. SCI. REV. 538 (1954).

8. VOEGELIN, THE NEW SCIENCE OF POLITICS 69 (1952).

9. HALLOWELL, THE MORAL FOUNDATION OF DEMOCRACY 95, 100 (1954).

Our authors agree with the Reece Committee in rejecting empiricism as an approach to the study of politics. Voegelin makes a violent attack upon the collection of data without the guidance of "classical and Christian metaphysics."¹⁰ Evidently the central metaphysical principle is soteriology, but an edited soteriology. Christian soteriology, says Voegelin, was in the beginning corrupted by gnosticism; and, in the twelfth century, it was again corrupted by the idea of progress in the "Everlasting Gospel" of Joachim of Flora. Voegelin dates from Joachim all historically oriented movements that look to the future for the betterment of human society, and these too he denounces as "Gnosticism": the Protestants, the Puritans, the Quakers, the Encyclopedists, the socialists, the existentialists, and, more generally, "progressivism, positivism, scientism,"¹¹ are the bearers of this vicious tradition. So it is to the Dark Ages that Voegelin looks for his political principles.

Strauss directs his principal attack against Max Weber, whose name is among the most prominent in the development of method in the social sciences. What the name of Weber stands for is, of course, the proposition that science must confine itself to the study of fact, without pretending to arrive at ultimate value judgments. The theoretical foundation of Weber's position is the epistemology of Kant, which is the basis of scientific method and therefore of positivism. Strauss sidles around the epistemological question and attacks Weber on minor grounds. He also raises a bogeyman: positivism undermines morals and somehow leads to Hitler.

Hallowell has the most detailed roster of purveyors of error. He does not reach back, as Voegelin, to Joachim, but, beginning with Helvetius in the eighteenth century, he excoriates Robert Owen, Freud, Pareto, William James, John Dewey, E. R. Bentley, Thurman Arnold, Harold Lasswell, and Hadley Cantril; he devotes a whole chapter to T. V. Smith. These men miss true rationalism by excess or defect. For Hallowell, as for Strauss, the intellectual errors of our time sum up in positivism. It was the "liberal, positivist jurists" who, "unwittingly it may be, prepared the way for Lidice and Dachau."¹² If his book demonstrated the philosophical unsoundness of positivism, it would certainly be the most important book of our generation; but, instead of argument, it offers only dubious propositions about historical causation like that quoted above.

Strauss, at least, believes in the possibility of excogitating an ethics, and the whole school attacks positivism as "irrational" because it insists

10. VOEGELIN, *op. cit.* *supra* note 8, at 12.

11. *Id.* at 164.

12. HALLOWELL, *op. cit.* *supra* note 9, at 80.

that value judgments lie outside the range of demonstrable propositions. But, apparently, one can be too rational, for Hallowell reproves the *philosophes* for their "unbounded confidence in man's ability to be persuaded by reason to establish a just social order."¹³ Hallowell's reason is "not that emasculated idea of reason which has infected post-Cartesian philosophy, a reason cut loose from love and debarred from vision, . . . but rather a reason directed toward God as its ultimate goal." It is a "seeing passion" which is "the love of God."¹⁴

It follows that—leaving Strauss aside—human society is comprehensible only in theological terms. Simon tells us that God has conferred spiritual power directly on the Pope; temporal power he has vested in the people, who transfer it to their rulers. Even in a democracy, however, the power of decision does not rest with the people: it rests with "authority." Extremely grave abuses may justify the deposition of kings, or the coercion of elected officials by public opinion; but the latter step, like the former, is revolutionary.

This politics necessarily entails an attack upon individualism. Although our authors cite John Locke with approval when his prestige can be drawn to their cause, in fact they reject his whole system. The state, says Simon, is not an artificial creation aimed at convenience; it is the natural condition of man. The "common good," the object of this natural society, transcends the additive particular goods of the members. Authority determines this common good, and this is not inconsistent with liberty; liberty and authority are supplementary and indeed appear to be almost identical.¹⁵ Hallowell tells us that freedom is not "the power to do what one wants"; it is "service to God and one's fellow-men."¹⁶ It is liberty in this sense that enters into the tables of democratic values which our authors sometimes supply. It is therefore natural that religious liberty is nowhere included as one of the democratic values.¹⁷ In this system God accepts only one kind of service. Did not Aquinas say that "heretics not only may be excommunicated but also may justly be put to death"?¹⁸

13. *Id.* at 86.

14. *Id.* at 101.

15. "But with regard to the essential functions of authority, there is no conflict whatsoever between authority and liberty. The more definitely a community is directed toward its common good and protected from disunity in its common action, the more perfect and the more free it is." SIMON, *PHILOSOPHY OF DEMOCRATIC GOVERNMENT* 140-141 (1951).

16. HALLOWELL, *op. cit. supra* note 9, at 129.

17. Hallowell, however, does say that it is undemocratic to deny the right to vote on account of religious affiliation. *Id.* at 51.

18. *SUMMA THEOLOGICA*, II-II, Q. xi, ad 3.

Similarly freedom of speech is confined, as in the Soviet Union, to a discussion of means. The ends toward which society is directed are not open to argument. Simon says: "Under fully normal circumstances the propositions relative to the very ends of social life are above deliberation in democracy as well as in any other system. Circumstances which make it necessary to deliver the principles of society, its very soul, to the hazards of controversy are a fateful threat to any regime, democratic or not."¹⁹ Hallowell quotes this passage with approval,²⁰ and warns against the individual conscience that has "'freed' itself from the Christian revelation and the authority of the church."²¹

But suppose the majority of the society has already been corrupted by bad argument and led astray from the common good. Voegelin boldly faces up to the question of what is to be done with a democratic society in which "Gnosticism"—that is individualism, Protestantism, socialism, existentialism—commands the allegiance of the majority. In this case it is necessary to jettison democratic procedures in order to save the common good.

Theoretical debate can be protected by constitutional guaranties, but it can be established only by the willingness to use and accept theoretical argument [*i.e.*, theology]. When this willingness does not exist, a society cannot rely for its functioning on argument and persuasion where the truth of human existence is involved; other means will have to be considered. . . .

. . . a government has the duty to preserve the order as well as the truth which it represents; when a Gnostic leader appears and proclaims that God or progress, race or dialectic, has ordained him to become the existential ruler, a government is not supposed to betray its trust and to abdicate. And this rule suffers no exception for governments which operate under a democratic constitution and a bill of rights. . . . A democratic government is not supposed to become an accomplice in its overthrow by letting Gnostic movements grow prodigiously in the shelter of a muddy interpretation of civil rights; and if through inadvertence such a movement has grown to the danger point of capturing existential representation by the famous "legality" of popular elections, a democratic government is not supposed to bow to the "will of the people" but to put down the

19. SIMON, *op. cit. supra* note 15, at 123.

20. HALLOWELL, *op. cit. supra* note 9, at 122.

21. *Id.* at 74.

danger by force and, if necessary, to break the letter of the constitution in order to save its spirit.²²

Unfortunately we are not told directly what course of action is proper when the government as well as the people is "Gnostic"; but perhaps Franco showed us the way in Spain.

One can perhaps understand why authors in possession of a precious truth which they infallibly know are unwilling to risk it on what Voegelin calls the "loaded dice"²³ of free discussion; but what explains their animus against the empirical method and experimental research? There is good reason. Science rests upon the Kantian distinction between fact and value, and this too is fatal to their truth. St. Thomas undertook to objectify value by asserting that what is is somehow a reflection of what ought to be; what ought to be, on the other hand, obtains its warrant from what is. The philosophy of natural law comes down to a simple semantic confusion; scientific method precludes this confusion.

We may suspect also another motive. Thomistic natural law has become the philosophy of conservatism because it represents, whatever happens to exist as a mirror of what ought to be. But the seam in this comforting cloak can easily be rent in either of two directions. A dispassionate examination of facts reveals that there is not even an approximate correspondence between existing facts and any generalized ethical scheme. And there is an opposite danger. The enthusiastic adoption of an ethical program explicitly at variance with the existing facts—"Gnosticism" or any other reformist movement—threatens the monopoly of the existing church, which claims a divine sanction, and the existing state, which is said to have a natural sanction. The status quo can tolerate neither an analysis of the past nor a program for the future. It is for this reason that Simon must insist that "deliberation is about means and presupposes that the problem of ends has been settled."²⁴ The problem of ends must not be opened up. This leads to "Gnosticism" or to positivism. Indeed, it may, according to our authors, lead further. Simon tells us that "[i]n times of social and political convulsions, a skeptical thinker, an agnostic intellectual, may reveal that his sense for the absolute, diverted from being by idealism, rendered acute by culture, and frustrated by doubt, has grown into a destructive frenzy."²⁵ According to Voegelin, "[t]otalitarianism, defined as the existential rule of Gnostic activists, is the end form of progressive civilization."²⁶ Strauss asserts

22. VOEGELIN, *op. cit. supra* note 8, at 142-144.

23. *Ibid.*

24. SIMON, *op. cit. supra* note 15, at 123.

25. *Id.* at 92.

26. VOEGELIN, *op. cit. supra* note 8, at 132.

that "[t]he contemporary rejection of natural right leads to nihilism—nay, it is identical with nihilism," and that "[t]he inescapable practical consequence of nihilism is fanatical obscurantism."²⁷ Hallowell assimilates the positivist to Plato's tyrant. "When the individual revolts against tradition and authority, when instinct and desire are exalted above reason, when intellect is subordinated to will, when all desires become lawful and no standard is left for choosing among them, then at last a master-passion '. . . takes madness for the captain of its guard. . . .'"²⁸

It is unlikely that the reader, who is probably "Gnostic," agnostic, or positivist, will recognize himself in these portraits. He will not be conscious of destructive frenzy, nihilism, or fanatical obscurantism. Indeed, it seems that these proscribed classes have a deeper devotion to rationality than the authors under review. Each of these authors is confronted by the epistemology of Kant, an obstacle that must be overcome if their position is to be validated philosophically. Answers to Kant have been contrived; they have not received general acceptance. But these authors do not undertake to answer Kant; they never mention him. Their only reply to the Kantian position is the assertion that it leads to socially undesirable results. Blasphemy is an offense of indeterminate dimensions, but surely a believer must count it blasphemy to offer as an argument for God the utilitarian consideration that the idea is a social convenience.

We must face up to the universe. It is not really profitable to dismiss the work of Freud and Bentley and Lasswell because it makes us uncomfortable, or because it damages the prestige of existing institutions. Nor does facing up to the universe inspire one with megalomania. Hitler was after all no positivist: on the contrary, he was an absolutist cut from the very piece of cloth our authors peddle. On the other hand history's greatest skeptic, Anatole France, drew this compassionate moral from an unflinching survey of human society: "Let us appoint Irony and Pity the witnesses and judges of mankind."

Simon opens his book: "Communism and national socialism have come to resemble each other in so many respects that their historical diversity and their lasting opposition arouse wonder."²⁹ We may add a third to this list; it is what Voegelin has called "the new science of politics." This authoritarian creed is the enemy of free inquiry, of free thought, of the individual conscience. It will tolerate discussion only of

27. STRAUSS, *NATURAL RIGHT AND HISTORY* 5, 6 (1953).

28. HALLOWELL, *op. cit. supra* note 9, at 109-110.

29. SIMON, *op. cit. supra* note 15, at 1.

means by those who accept prescribed ends; and these prescribed ends are determined by a prescribed religion. There is nothing new about this "science," and its history is a history of ceaseless persecution. One of the most disquieting things about the time in which we live is this revival of intellectual obscurantism.

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